Answering Deontology and Consequentialism

Every single topic implicates this debate. If you know that almost every case pre-supposes consequentialism or deontology, you should be prepared to dump responses on them. A lot of people, similarly, freeze up against stock objections to the philosophy.

I. Brief overview

A. Normative ethics: a branch of ethics distinct from metaethics. Metaethics asks what it means when we state a moral proposition. Normative ethics asks what it means to behave morally.

1. Ethical theory, the broad theory of consequentialism and deontology

2. Applied ethics: applications of ethical frameworks

B. Consequentialism

1. The morality of an action is determined by its outcome or result

2. There is a non-moral, agent-neutral value

C. Deontology

1. Morality of action determined by moral duty or obligation. Need an explicit defense of why morality is not determined by consequentialism

2. There are agent-relative moral obligations or restrictions

II. Stock answers to consequentialism

1. “We can’t predict consequences.”
2. This assumes we should hold prediction to the standard of absolute scientific certainty, which is absurd. We make decisions everyday based off assumptions to make good decisions. This standard would paralyze action in the face of uncertainty, which is all the time.
3. Turn, consequences are more certain than unverifiable moral intentions. At least with effects we can generate conclusions with empirical research.
4. “Utilitarianism collapses into hedonism.”
5. No link, many types of utilitarianism exist that don’t only look to unrestricted happiness, such as welfare utilitarianism.
6. No impact, there is no reason why it’s bad for people to pursue happiness.
7. This argument confuses different conceptions of hedonism. There’s no reason people pursue happiness selfishly; people could pursue happiness altruistically.
8. “There is a difference between the right and the good, but you only defend what is good.”
9. This begs the question. Consequentialism says what is right is derived from what is good.
10. This is just an appeal to intuition because we feel some actions aren’t right, but I’ve proved why rightness is derived from goodness.
11. “Utilitarianism disrespects the separateness of persons.”
12. *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. p. 29-30. Robert Nozick says that side-constraints can be violated in the case of extremely bad circumstances.
13. Trap them into threshold deontology, which says we will act like a deontologist until we reach a point where we become consequentialists.
14. “Utilitarianism justifies slavery.”
15. No link, this assumes that the good is something patently immoral. My form of utilitarianism specifies a different value than the economic benefit of the South.
16. Consequentialism solves this problem because it force the decision maker to include harms and benefits of everyone involved. It does not allow for discrimination.
17. “There are big calculability dilemmas with consequentialism. We cannot measure consequences.”
18. Against infinite utility: The objection does not apply to my version of utility, and even if there is an infinite future, there still is not infinite utility (Valentine).

III. Stock answers to deontology

1. “Rights sometimes conflict. There are competing obligations that cause paralysis and undermine deontology.”
2. Inaction is not morally blameworthy. We are not intending to harm, so we don’t violate the side-constraint.
3. The statistical likelihood of a violation is irrelevant; we care about our status as dignified human beings.
4. “You can’t ascertain intent.”
5. Of course we can ascertain intent because we need to be able to set minimum standards for intent, such as the legal justice system. We can still make reasoned judgments.
6. “There is no distinction between positive and negative rights, so we must weigh all these things equally and look to their consequences.”
7. Even if there is no distinction, some rights are still more important. For example, the right against coercion is a given because people are moral equals, so we cannot assume one person’s will is superior to another’s.
8. To say there is no distinction is an infringement on our liberty because it would mean we have obligations to other actors.
9. “There is no morally relevant distinction between acts and omissions because inaction is a deliberate choice.”
10. The decision to act or not act is not causally responsible for what happened. There is a proximate cause for the problem, which represents the most direct cause, rather than our inaction.
11. This approach would lead to absurd ethical implications. It would condemn us for going to debate camp instead of devoting our resources to Africa.

IV. Theories of consequentialism

1. There is a difference between act and rule consequentialism. Act consequentialism says we determine whether or not to take an action on the basis of summing the impacts associated with that action in a vacuum. Rule consequentialists think about the consequences of a certain rule of our behavior would be.
2. Hedonistic utilitarianism: Bentham.
3. Rights utilitarianism: Mill. Should value rights.
4. Negative consequentialism: Glover. Consequentialism should not be concerned with promoting good, but rather, minimizing bad.
5. Welfare consequentialism: Amartya Sen. Concerned with welfare.
6. Preference satisfaction utilitarianism: Peter Singer.
7. Hybrid consequentialism: Samuel Scheffler.

V. Theories of deontology

A. Kantian: emphasizes rationality and retribution.

B. Contractarianism: Rawls and Guathier.

C. Entitlement theory: Nozick.

D. Contractualism: Scanlon.

VI. Big reason why you should be familiar

1. Being good at consequentialism and deontology allows you to be good on the standards debate.
2. Write blocks based on the answers to the stock objections.